

Worldwide Crisis: How and With Whom Can We Reorganise Society? The Importance of Enlightenment

The standpoint of humanistic psychology is relatively new, not yet thoroughly elaborated, difficult to communicate and not in the interest of the ruling class.

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The world is in a state that leaves little hope. While inexhaustible financial resources are provided for global wars and weapons that slay people beyond the borders, several million children and young people are at risk of poverty in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. That is why people need to be educated; they need to be told the truth.

But education alone will not transform society. Also, the state of the world should not only be described, but above all changed. But how and with whom is this to be done? The research results of depth psychology point to the education of young people. It is more important than enlightenment. But the viewpoint of humanistic psychology is relatively new, not yet thoroughly elaborated, difficult to communicate and above all not in the interest of the ruling class, the state and the church.

Regardless of this, it is of great importance for a peaceful and humane future to provide people with the psychological knowledge about themselves and their fellow human beings through education and enlightenment, so that they can both solve their personal problems and begin to steer the world in a peaceful direction.

Youth, as the outpost of a new society, progress and a more humane world, should receive our special attention.

On the importance of enlightenment

Since politics is prepared in the minds and hearts of people, people will act tomorrow as they think today. Therefore, the importance of the Enlightenment cannot be overestimated. The purpose of Enlightenment efforts is to purify human consciousness of individual and collective prejudices.

The destruction of prejudices means more than a mere intellectual endeavour; the “enlightened mind” is capable of envisaging healthy life goals. The future of our culture will largely depend on whether there will be enough “enlightened minds” capable of removing from the broad masses of people those prejudices which are the ideological background of the catastrophes of humanity. Intellectuals have a great responsibility in this, because it would be their duty to think for other people and to proclaim freedom in general with the freedom of thought.

At a time when the threat of the atomic bomb makes the self-destruction of humanity seem possible, we need more than ever the “free spirits” who teach us what is truth and what is a lie.

The French Enlightenment philosopher Baron **Paul-Henri Thiry d’Holbach** wrote about this 250 years ago in the introduction to his book “The Common Sense of Father Meslier”:

“It is a vain effort to try to cure people of their vices if one does not begin by curing their prejudices. They must be told the truth, so that they may learn to know their dearest interests and the true motives which lead them to virtue and their true happiness.

The teachers of the people have long enough raised their eyes to heaven; would that they would finally turn them to earth! (...). Let us tell people that they want to be just, charitable, moderate and sociable, not because their gods demand it, but because one must seek to please one’s neighbour; (...).

Truth is simple, error is complicated, uncertain in its course and surrounded by deviations. The voice of nature is intelligible; that of falsehood is ambiguous, enigmatic, mysterious. The path of truth is straight, that of deceit is crooked and dark. This truth is necessary to all men, and is felt by all the righteous. The teachings of reason are for all those who are of an honest mind. Men are unhappy because they are ignorant; they are ignorant because everything conspires against their enlightenment, and are bad merely because their powers of thought are not sufficiently developed.” (1)

One truth of the present, for example, is that inequality among people in Germany – one of the world’s wealthiest states – is growing faster than during the pandemic, that more than ten million people, including several million children and young people, are at risk of poverty, and that more and more people are falling below the poverty line, which, according to the warning of economist and DIW head Marcel Fratzscher, would have “fatal consequences for society” (that is, for the foundations of democratic coexistence) (2).

But enlightenment alone is not enough to transform contemporary society. The state of today’s world should not only be described, but above all changed.

Even more important than enlightenment is the problem of education. The research results of psychology – especially depth psychology – have made education clear in its immense scope.

Psychology in the tradition of humanism

Humanistic thinking, which has permeated the history of mankind since its beginnings, has become increasingly important in European intellectual life since the end of the Middle Ages and the dawn of the early modern period. This refers to the kind of thinking that

gradually freed itself from mystical speculation, obscurantism and belief in authority and set itself the task of investigating the things of the world without prejudice, realistically and tolerantly. "Obscurantism" is understood as the endeavour to deliberately keep people in ignorance, to prevent their independent thinking and to make them believe in the supernatural.

The emergence of scientific thinking in the early modern period also resulted in a realistic view of human beings: human individuality, the ability to learn and develop, as well as the goodness of human beings and the importance of education became central themes of philosophy.

The historically significant struggle against any paternalism, for freedom of the mind and tolerance among people began. The Enlightenment also introduced the idea of freedom, equality and fellow humanity as the basic prerequisite for a dignified human life.

Yet even today we live in a world in which man has not recognised himself. He has recognised and explored everything, but he has not recognised himself, his nature, his mental condition, his modes of reaction.

Before the age of psychology, in contrast to science based on causality, the magical world view of the Middle Ages and religion prevailed and had a firm grip on people. It was believed that man's soul was only undergoing a trial here in this world and that man belonged in heaven; there was eternal life.

The fact is that in a sense we are still living in the Middle Ages. We have not left medieval thinking and feeling behind us. The majority of people still live in this state.

It is true that the successes in the natural sciences have shed some light on the problem, but people still think as they did in the Middle Ages, praying to gods, to the devil and to angels. Without psychology, humanity will not progress: The fact that we wage wars is due to the lack of psychological knowledge. The fact that people are unhappy, that they have difficulties in life, that our social order does not function properly, is also due to the ignorance of psychology.

People are programmed by all institutions – starting from education at home up to recruit school and the "field of honour". This is programming, this is conscious. And people are kept in this mood all their lives.

Psychology is a science about man, about human nature: how he becomes, how he grows up and how he finds his way in life.

On the basis of his experiences, which are above all imparted to him by his parents and teachers, he is then the product of his experiences, his impressions in childhood. Already in the first five to six years of life – when the child enters kindergarten – it already has its compass. It already knows how it should behave and has an opinion about the other child, about father, mother, siblings. It already has its way, its character traits, its position in the world.

Depth psychological knowledge of human nature and the teachings of the individual psychologist Alfred Adler as a cornerstone of depth psychology.

The research results of **depth psychology**, which attach great importance to the unconscious mental processes in explaining human behaviour and experience (**Freud, Jung, Adler**), can help psychologically irritated people to solve their problems in marriage, with children and in social and state life. Young people can be given the psychological tools to take the world in a different direction for once.

The basic assumptions of depth psychology are above all the assumption of a dynamic unconscious as an essential and highly effective part of our psychological life, as well as the psychological mechanism of repression, transference and counter-transference and the importance of early childhood for the later personality.

Alfred Adler's teaching has become a cornerstone of depth psychology and it is impossible to imagine psychological research without it. The development of depth psychology has proved Adler right on many points. For example, the realisation that human beings are not simply determined by instincts, that human character does not develop as a result of a hereditary process, and that community is of central importance in human life.

For Adler, character is a creative product of the child, arising from the confrontation with early childhood circumstances, especially the educational influences that are most decisive for the formation of character.

Even medicine, after initial resistance from the Church, has only progressed by recognising the function of the body. In the same way, depth psychology wants to explore the spiritual and mental life of the human being. Then we can also answer the question of who wages war, who conjures it up in each case. Are they people like us or are they other people?

Depth psychology - a child of natural science

Some mature people who have had a laid table and the opportunity to educate and research have divined that the social system as it is is not right. Three of them may be mentioned briefly: **Feuerbach, Marx** and **Kropotkin**.

The epistemological standpoint of the German philosopher, anthropologist and critic of religion **Ludwig Feuerbach** (1804-1872) has become fundamental to modern human sciences such as psychology and ethnology. He demanded that man must finally stop being a plaything of the anti-human powers that use religion for oppression:

“We see man bent under the burden of creatures who are but products of their own unfree and fearful minds, ignorant and uneducated. If we replace the love of God with the love of man, if we replace the faith in God with the faith of man in himself, in his own power, we shall turn believers into thinkers, prayers into workers, candidates of the hereafter into students of the hereafter, and we shall at last be able to become whole men.” (3)

The German philosopher, economist, social theorist, historian, protagonist of the workers' movement and critic of capitalism and religion **Karl Marx** (1818-1883) based his work on Feuerbach. Marx and others - for example, the anarchists - began to see the human being correctly. If the struggle against these thoughts had not been waged, humanity would be much further along, people would be able to arrange their lives better in every respect today.

Marx rejected the supernatural tendency and saw man as a being of nature whose attitude

can be changed. He meant that conditions change man. When man has the security of his life, he thinks differently; he has different thoughts, different feelings, a different relationship to his fellow man. Marx held that man's consciousness is shaped by circumstances. His greatness was that he brought man back to earth. He believed that man can change. And depth psychology confirms this. If you give people freedom, they become healthy.

As long as everyone cannot live humanely and without fear in this world, Marx believed, there will be faith in a better hereafter, in a balancing justice:

“Religion is the striving for illusory happiness of the people, which springs from a state of society which needs illusion.” (4)

The Russian anarchist, socialist, historian, geographer, scientist as well as philosopher and writer **Prince Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin** (1842-1921) fought for a society free of violence and domination and is considered one of the most influential theorists of communist anarchism. His scientific work was “Mutual Aid in the Animal and Human World”.

Kropotkin accomplished a great feat by observing nature as well as natural beings and relating his observations to man. Peter Kropotkin anticipated today's opinion of man, which is confirmed by scientific depth psychology. The modern era began with him. In the modern age, people began to recognise the human being correctly. Here is a moving, deeply psychological quote from Kropotkin:

“The human being who is trained to identify with his surroundings, a human being who is aware of the power of his heart, of his will, places his abilities freely at the service of others, without expecting any reward for it in this or any other world. Above all, he has the ability to understand the feelings of others, to experience them. This is enough. He shares joys and sorrows with others. He helps them to bear the difficult times of their lives. He feels his strength and generously uses up his abilities to love others, to inspire others, to awaken in them the belief in a better future and to inspire them to fight for this future. Whatever fate reaches him, he takes it not as suffering but as the fulfilment of his life, which he does not wish to exchange for a dutiful vegetation; he may prefer dangers to a life devoid of struggle and content.” (5)

Together with the materialist conception of history and by demanding the factor of mutual aid for evolution, Kropotkin anticipated decisive insights of depth psychology.

The **materialistic conception of history** was an enormous intrusion into the emotional world of man: belief in gods and supernatural beings ceased. Before that, man was still in the Middle Ages in his thinking. It was only through the materialistic conception of history that man began to deal with himself, to recognise himself, to interpret himself and to explain to himself why he behaves the way he does.

Before the materialistic conception of history, the opinion prevailed that the soul of man merely undergoes a trial here in this world and that eternal life only begins in heaven.

On the importance of education

As already indicated in the section “On the Importance of Enlightenment”, the problem of education is even more important than enlightenment. The results of depth-psychological

research have made education clear in its immense significance.

The authoritarian principle, for centuries regarded as the unquestionably valid basis of educational behaviour, throttled people's sense of community in childhood and endowed them with the readiness for aggression that enabled a violent world to remain in a state of violence.

Today we know that man is to such an extent the product of his upbringing that we may cherish the hope of being able, through better, i.e. psychological, methods of education, to train people who will be immune to the entanglements of the mania for power.

By renouncing exclusive authority and the use of force in the home and school and adapting to the child's soul with true understanding, education will produce a type of human being who does not have a "subject mentality" and who will therefore no longer be a docile tool for those in power in our world.

The democratisation of education, understood as respect for the child's personality and as friendly devotion of the educator to his pupil on the basis of consistent anti-authority, is called upon to make one of the most valuable contributions to the building of a humane social order.

An enlightened, rational and compassionate youth can for once steer the world on a different course.

Even before the pandemic wave and long before the worldwide clamour for war, young people from a prosperous European country reported:

"The poets rejoice: 'Beautiful is youth'. But what does it actually look like? A closer look reveals a different reality. The mental distress is great; in all areas of life we are either very challenged or overburdened. What we learn about the world and human beings is characterised by ignorance and unenlightenment. Our parents, despite their best efforts, are unable to give us a realistic introduction to life. In our nurseries, the principle of religion and mysticism, of pampering and strictness prevails. Recognition is always conditional; only performance counts.

Quite irritated, we come to school where the preconceived ideas are reinforced and cemented: stupid and clever, poor and rich. What counts is getting a good grade, not helping each other. Teachers do not have the empathy to feel and address our emotional distress.

That's how we stand there: without enlightenment about man and the world, disoriented as well as incapable of setting up our own lives and a beautiful love. Having gone through this education, we are caricatures of what we could be. On this soil of mystical upbringing, faced with school failure and love problems, every young person is prepared for drugs. Young people who should be the future are perishing by the thousands in unspeakable agony from narcotics."

Since the beginning of 2020, the general situation is likely to have worsened.

Why not tell the youth not to go to war? Mothers, fathers, philosophers and psychologists, professors and personalities from all faculties.

If that is possible, and if it is possible for young people to be united – united in living and working together – then **they will be able to punch a hole in this world**. They are, after all, the outposts of a new society, of progress. Above all, young people can bring about a revolution, a reorganisation of society; create a more beautiful and humane world.

I believe in youth, in their ability to learn, their creativity, their empathy, their sense of responsibility, their insightfulness and willingness to change. Most of the time, all young people lack is some prudence and perseverance so that they can develop their competencies in small steps.

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Notes

(1) D'Holbach, P.-H. T. (1976). The common sense of the priest Meslier. Critical thoughts on religion and its impact on cultural development. Zurich, pp. 4ff.

(2) <https://de.rt.com/inland/155345-experten-warnen-soziale-schere-klafft/>

(3) De.wikipedia.org. Keyword "Ludwig Feuerbach"

(4) De.wikipedia.org. Keyword "The German Ideology"

(5) From: Grasenack, Moritz (ed.). The libertarian psychotherapy of Friedrich Liebling. Lich / Hesse, p. 45

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